DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 289 121 CG 020 387

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TITLE Understanding Gifted Adolescents and Meeting Their Cognitive and Emotional Needs through School Counseling.
PUB DATE Nov 86
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (15th, Memphis, TN, November 19-21, 1986).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academically Gifted; *Adolescents; *Counselor Role; Emotional Development; *Gifted; Occupational Aspiration; School Counseling; *School Counselors; School Guidance; Secondary Education; Student Development; *Student Needs

ABSTRACT

Through the years, gifted adolescents have suffered from a lack of formal guidance from the school counselor. Probably the most common reason for the lack of quality counseling for the gifted student stems from the general yet erroneous belief that the gifted child can take care of himself/herself. Alvino (1981) noted that when counselors do work with gifted students, they place primary emphasis on cognitive development and often overlook the students' emotional needs. To help the gifted adolescent, Walker (1982) advocated group guidance with emphasis on decision making. Williams (1982) depicted the Rogerian client-centered approach as crucial to career-related aptitudes. Simpson and Kaufmann (1981) felt that counselors could help all gifted adolescents develop their full potential in a vocational sense. Hyman and Brody (1984) noted, however, that the counselor is often a poor, ineffectual source of encouragement particularly for the female gifted adolescent seeking vocational guidance. Kerr (1983) wrote that raising the career aspirations of gifted females is most important. Whatever the reason for ineffectual guidance and counseling for the gifted adolescent, not one is defensible. The counselor must help the gifted adolescent acquire essential decision making skills. The gifted student's vocational aspirations and achievements ultimately depend on this. (Author)

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ED289121

Understanding Gifted Adolescents and Meeting Their Cognitive and Emotional Needs Through School Counseling

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Presented at the Annual Meeting

Mid-South Educational Research Association (MSERA)

Memphis, Tennessee

November 19-21, 1986

CG 020387

Running head: Wanted: Counselors

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Abstract

Through the years, gifted adolescents have suffered from a lack of formal guidance from the school counselor (Alvino, 1981). Probably the most common reason for the lack of quality counseling for the gifted student stems from the general yet erroneous belief that the gifted child can take care of himself/herself (Colson, 1982; Gallagher, 1980; Simpson & Kaufmann, 1981). Alvino (1981) noted that when counselors do work with gifted students, they place primary emphasis on cognitive development and often overlook their emotional needs. To help the gifted adolescent, Walker (1982) advocated group guidance with emphasis on decision making. Williams (1982) depicted the Rogerian client-centered approach as crucial to career-related aptitudes. Simpson and Kaufmann (1981) felt that counselors could help all gifted adolescents develop their full potential in a vocational sense. Hyman and Brody (1984) noted, however, that the counselor is often a poor, ineffectual source of encouragement particularly for the female gifted adolescent seeking vocational guidance. Kerr (1983) wrote that raising the career aspirations of gifted females is most important. Whatever the reason for ineffectual guidance and counseling for the gifted adolescent, not one is defensible. The counselor must help the gifted adolescent acquire essential decision-making skills; the gifted's vocational aspirations and achievements ultimately depend on this.

Understanding Gifted Adolescents and Meeting Their Cognitive and Emotional Needs Through School Counseling

In a day of cost benefit analyses where some educational programs hang tenuously by a thread of support, few educators, legislators, parents, or members of the general public doubt the need for a counseling program within the public school systems of this country. Justification for the continued existence of guidance and counseling within this particular American institution, in fact, seems unnecessary and unwarranted.

Within the school counseling program, however, decisions about the services that should be offered and about who the recipients of such services should be comprise a major problem for counselors today. Conflicts between what counselors feel compelled to do and what teachers, parents, and the general public expect them to do also pose a great dilemma. To further complicate the problem, counselors' conceptions about who needs counseling, what problems need discussing, and what approach is most appropriate for certain groups also cloud the issue.

Gifted Adolescents May Not Get Help from Counselors

Through the years, gifted adolescents, particularly, have suffered from a lack of formal guidance from the school counselor (Alvino, 1981). While many possible reasons for this neglect have been reported, Hyman and Brody (1984) stressed that counselors focus primarily on those students with apparent behavior and learning problems and that few counselors have

either mathematical or physical science backgrounds, areas in which gifted students typically express vocational interest and about which they desire more career information. Additionally, the counselor, faced with the swift technological advancements within these areas, may have trouble staying abreast of such rapid changes; relaying accurate career information to students can be difficult.

Probably the most common reason for the lack of quality counseling for the gifted student stems from the general yet erroneous belief that the gifted child can take care of himself/herself (Gallagher, 1980; Simpson & Kaufmann, 1981; Colson, 1982). Lester and Anderson (1981) pointed out that by the time the gifted child has reached the fourth grade, some critical life decisions are made; many elementary schools, however, have no counselor available for these students (Alvino, 1981).

Alvino (1981) noted that when counselors do work with gifted students, they place primary emphasis on cognitive development overlooking the emotional needs that may exist. In the educational setting, the regular classroom teacher or the gifted teacher is usually first to recognize the gifted's emotional problems and the need for counseling; the teacher also is more apt to provide counseling services in this area than counselors. While the effort is genuine on the part of the teacher, a lack of

formal training can prevent effective counseling from occurring. As a result, the gifted student's emotional needs often go unmet.

Importance of Organized Counseling for Gifted Students

Such commentary, while emphasizing the failure of counselors to effectively meet the needs of the gifted adolescent, nevertheless underscores the necessity of having effective, formal counseling services for the gifted. In a day of a public outcry for educational accountability, counselors supplying formal guidance and classroom teachers offering informal counseling can ill afford to ignore the gifted adolescent's special needs.

Simpson and Kaufmann (1981), supported by Walker (1982), reported that counselors could help the gifted "efficiently develop their full potential," particularly in a vocational sense. Developing the gifted child as a whole person is stressed by Colangelo and Parker (1981); they noted that counselors, teachers, and administrators might benefit from knowing and appreciating the value preferences of the gifted.

Major Needs and Concerns of the Gifted

What, then, are the major needs and concerns of the gifted? Answers to this question vary, but Culross (1982) presented ten specific "Guidance and Counseling Needs of the Gifted." The list included the components of (a) "recognizing/accepting personal abilities, interests, and limitations," (b) recognizing/accepting

the preceding concerns in others, (c) desiring "adequate social relationships," (d) needing to "explore, discover, and create," (e) developing "appropriate problem-solving skills," (f) developing "abilities without regard to race, sex, or ethnic group," (g) needing to work independently and to make decisions, (h) wanting to understand the attitudes of significant others toward the gifted, (i) "setting realistic goals and evaluating realistically," and finally, (j) needing to be challenged.

Lester and Anderson (1981) commented that a lack of emotional maturity can be a major problem for the gifted. Problems related to parent and sibling relationships and social and self-induced pressures, particularly to excel, create many problems for the gifted. In addition, the gifted adolescent faces both internal and external changes requiring constant adjustment. The counselor, the authors concluded, can make transition through this period of development and uncertainty less turbulent.

Counselor Intervention for the Gifted Adolescent

Counselor intervention for the gifted adolescent can and should take many forms (Simpson & Kaufman, 1981). Walker (1982) addressed the appropriateness of group guidance and the need for psychological education for the gifted and talented. The counselor can assist in the development of study, reading, communication, decision-making, and time management skills.

Decision Making

Of the preceding skills, application of decision-making skills is of primary importance to the gifted adolescent; adolescent career indecision and uncertainty, often heightened by parental pressures, warrant the special consideration that a counselor should be able to supply (Simpson & Kaufmann, 1981).

Altman (1983) expressed similar views about the gifted adolescent's adjustment and added that complicating factors such as perfectionism, fear of success and or failure, and social isolation also demands the counselor's attention. Considering these factors and the gifted's internal frame of reference, Griggs (1984) stressed that the counselor's options to the particular areas of decision making and career education are evident. This led Griggs to conclude the following:

> Hence, a broad range of counseling techniques can be used with these students: predominantly auditory approaches such as rational-emotive therapy and client-centered counseling; predominantly visual approaches such as guided imagery and puppetry; and predominantly tactile and kinesthetic approaches such as games, psychodrama, and serial drawing. (p. 431)

Williams (1982) supported the client-centered approach for counseling with gifted students. In particular, Williams promote the client-centered approach of Rogers as crucial to the

exploration of aptitudes, interests, or information related to career aspiration. The author, however, cautioned against strict adherence to any one counseling theory when working with the gifted student.

Also focusing on the decision making of gifted adolescents, Kaplan (1983) reported that these students compound the problem of making choices by excluding the affective domain from the decision-making process. Believing that one's emotions (values, interests, and feelings) should play no integral role in cognitive processes, the gifted adolescent may make decisions that ultimately prove dissatisfying. This tendency to "overvalue the cognitive" can be alleviated or modified through the efforts of the school counselor or the classroom teacher functioning as a counselor.

Career Options

Simpson and Kaufmann (1981) recommended that the gifted student, a multi-talented, multi-dimensional one, needs the opportunity to explore career options in an environment free of foregone conclusions and decisions and warns against the "premature determination" of a collegiate major and/or a professional career. Additionally, the authors stressed the importance of abandoning societal expectations for the gifted and suggested the consideration of one's leisure interests in career decision making. The counselor or the teacher offering career

educational opportunities might offer materials necessitating application of critical thinking skills.

Efforts to explore career options through group counseling activities provide the gifted with unique opportunities for enhancing self-concept and for understanding themselves. Group counseling sessions on stress, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, and career opportunities have been successfully implemented in some public school programs for gifted students (Klima, 1984).

Vocational Education

Colson (1982), in a brief yet perceptive article on the gifted and vocational education, noted the high percentage of gifted students dropping out of school, the high number of these students lacking direction after high school graduation, and the significant proportion of them expressing job dissatisfaction after entering the job market. All signs indicate a need for improved vocational assistance; this occurs in spite of the gifted adolescent's continued perception of the selection of a job as a "highly significant act." Vocational education programs like work-study, for example, enable gifted students to have the same opportunity as other students to apply their special abilities to real situations.

Counseling the Gifted Female Adolescent

Although the counselor should assume a major role in spearheading career awareness or group counseling programs aimed at meeting the needs of gifted adolescents, Hyman and Brody (1984) stated that the counselor is often an ineffectual source of encouragement, especially for the female gifted adolescent. Wilson (1982) added that "counselors respond more positively to gifted female clients with traditional career goals than nontraditional ones" (p. 59). For the gifted adolescent female, counselors should locate other females with established careers in male-dominated fields such as engineering and science to serve as role models. Similarly, the counselor can play an important role by assisting the gifted female in obtaining scholarships and grants in these same areas.

Raising the career aspirations of gifted females, also mentioned by Kerr (1983), is an important function that should also be initiated by the counselor. Since many females envision conflicts between family and career, they are prone to select the career requiring less personal sacrifice; a loss of salary and status is the obvious result. In such a case, creative counseling efforts in the form of individual and family counseling can be provided. Such an example is Nebraska's Guidance Laboratory for Gifted and Talented Students, a one day career guidance workshop for the administration of various tests

and questionnaires and the opportunity for participation in guided fantasy and group discussion.

Conclusion and Discussion

In conclusion, counselors within the public schools of our democratic nation cannot afford to allow the gifted adolescents in our schools not to pursue their special talents. Sherwood (1983) wrote that for the emerging adolescent "there must be some time in each day to act out confusions and squarely address those powerful feelings and questions about love relationships, physical growth, sexuality" and the like. The counselor is, obviously, at the core of this process; the gifted adolescent's fate may be in the counselor's hands.

Whatever the reason or reasons for ineffectual guidance and counseling for the gifted adolescent, not one is defensible. The special needs of this societal subpopulation must, in the name of democracy, be met. Counselors must recognize that the gifted have unique emotional needs in addition to the recognizable cognitive ones. Also, counselor recognition of the immense talent potential of the gifted adolescent must occur. A concerted effort on the part of the counselor and other members of his/her support staff must be exerted to help the gifted adolescent acquire essential decision-making skills; the gifted's vocational aspirations and achievements ultimately depend on this.

In a society where emphasis is on the "democracy of opportunity," Walker (1982) stated the following:

> Counselors, in providing appropriate services to this segment of the school population, will be required to extend their knowledge of the gifted and talented child, develop understanding of their needs, and become committed to their education. The services to the gifted and talented student will be unique in terms of structure and content. Counselors are needed to guide talent potential which Perrone (1980) defined as "the ability to perform at higher levels than their contemporaries." Guiding these students falls within the counselor's role. (p. 363)

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